

# Basic Design, a Needed Foundation for Designing a Successful Garment: A Case Study of Dressmakers in the Ho Municipality, Volta Region, Ghana

Selom Gbetodeme

Department of Fashion Design and Textiles, Ho Polytechnic, P.O. Box 217, Ho-VR, Ghana

Joana Amankwa

Department of Fashion Design and Textiles, Ho Polytechnic, P.O. Box 217, Ho-VR, Ghana

Noble Komla Dzegblor\*

Department of Industrial Art, Ho Polytechnic, P.O. Box 217, Ho-VR, Ghana

## ABSTRACT

To facilitate the design process in every art form, there are certain guidelines that all professional designers should use. These are known as elements and principles of design. This study is a survey carried out to assess the knowledge of dressmakers about basic design in the Ho Municipality of Ghana. Sixty dressmakers were randomly sampled for the study. A combination of questionnaires and purposive interview were used to collect data for analysis. It was found out that all the dressmakers had an idea about only one element of design, which is, line. Lack of formal education in fashion design was a major contributive factor to their knowledge deficit. The study concludes that, basic design has a positive impact on the designer's performance and therefore serves as an important tool used to attain competitive advantage in the fashion design industry.

**Keywords:** Dressmaker, fashion designer, design, basic design, design element, design principles

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

Basic design is the simplest and most important feature used in planning a work of art. The structure of any art work is based on the organization of the elements according to the principles of design. In every art form there are certain guidelines that all professional designers use whether consciously or sub-consciously and these are known as design elements and principles (Burke, 2011). It is therefore important to state that any design pertaining to fashion can never be complete without the elements and the principles of design. Fashion is the ideal of beauty currently accepted by a given segment of the population while the process of creating new styles in clothing, millinery and foot-wear is known as fashion designing (Tate, 1989).

An effective designing can be recognized by the wide range of elements of design considered with the skill and judgment used to select and combine the elements in a style. Design principles are guides for using design elements (Amenuke et al, 1999). They are applied in situations where one wishes to create an attractive design, for example, as used in fashion styles. To be a successful designer, a thorough knowledge and understanding of the basic principles of design is essential when designing (Cronje, 1996). There are several ideas or aspects of design that need to be kept in mind. These aspects of design can be categorized into two areas which are the principles and elements of design.

### 1.1 The elements of design

Elements of design are the basic parts or qualities that are used in the design process (Amenuke et al, 1999). The four basic ingredients or elements of design used in fashion are shape or silhouette, line, colour and texture.

### 1.2 Shape or Silhouette

A silhouette can be described as the outline of the entire garment. This is the most obvious visual element of the garment. It creates the initial impact before any other details are noticed. The shape formed by the outer lines of clothing is known as silhouette. It is what others notice from a distance and it is responsible for the first impressions. Silhouettes tend to repeat themselves in cycles throughout history (Vanderhoff, 1973). Vanderhoff further explained that the silhouette encloses all other design lines in an outfit. Throughout each decade as trends develop so different fashion silhouettes evolve and these compliment the shape of the body or exaggerated to accentuate a different part of the body (Burke, 2011).

### **1.3 Lines**

Line refers to edge or the outline of a garment and the style line that divide the space within a garment. Line can create visual illusion if used skillfully (Tate, 1998). Line is the simplest and the most important of the design elements. All lines have length and width (Manmeet, 2008). Basically, straight and curved lines are used in designing styles for clothing. A straight line can be vertical, horizontal or diagonal. According to Vanderhoff, lines have direction, width, and length. Direction can be vertical, horizontal, diagonal or curved, movement of the eye of an observer around and through an image (Nateman, 1994). It is important to understand that lines create illusions or images. The design line of a garment, helps the viewer's eyes to follow a certain direction. These lines can be cleverly used to improve body shapes and proportions. The line of a garment relates to its cut and style lines: its construction. These lines break up the space within the outline of the garment and create shape, the seam lines, the darts, pleats, tucks (Burke, 2011). Vertical lines tend to lengthen the body and make it appear slimmer.

A diagonal line normally slants from one side to the other and it tends to increase or decrease in width, height and the direction to the height of the figure. If it is fairly short and fairly sharp, it decreases the width. If it is fairly flat it adds width to the top of the figure. Examples of diagonal lines used in fashion designing are: flared skirts, jacket, lapel collar, neckline, bell-bottom trousers, yokes, cowl-neck, etc. Curved lines vary from gentle curves to full rounded and twisted lines. Tate (2003) states that a gentle curve is feminine. Vanderhoff confirmed the above by saying that curved lines tend to add softness and femininity to a design. A curved line that is controlled is gentle, flowing and graceful. Curved lines may be used decoratively such as scalloped edges. In designing, high curves suggest greater height than lower curves. Basically, curved lines are either rounded or somewhat flattened out. The flattened out curves are often considered more flattering to the human shape than rounded lines. A curved line also adds fullness and roundness in a design sketch, when it is used in illustrating folds or gathers (Vanderhoff).

The structural lines of a garment give it shape and help to form the silhouette. Structural lines are made by sewing together the parts of a garment. Seams and darts are structural lines because they shape the garment. A garment can sometimes be cut in certain places to make a special seam. This seam is still considered a structural line. Design or decorative lines on the other hand are those that are added simply to create a decorative element. They are never structural lines even though some structural lines are sometimes design lines which include such details as the placement of several buttons in a line, top stitching or the placement of a pocket or flap. Design and structural lines can be used to enhance the body shape. The more elaborate the lines are, the more attention they draw to the body. Large bold lines make the figure look larger than it actually is. E.g. a decorated rolled collar framing a beautiful face might divert the eye from a heavy hip (Vanderhoff).

### **1.4 Texture**

Texture is the characteristic structure as well as the surface quality of a material (Manmeet, 2008). Texture describes the perceived quality of a surface whether real or simulated (Nateman, 1994). The texture of a fabric appeals to the eyes as well as the sense of touch. Texture refers to the surface appearance and feel of a fabric. This results from the type of raw material and the type of weave used in producing the fabric (Vanderhoff). The texture of a fabric may be described as soft, rough, shiny, dull, bulky, filmy, transparent, thick and smooth. Design and texture are closely related in that, at times the design of the weave determines the texture. The degree of stiffness or softness and the weight of the fabric will influence the drape, which is the way it hangs on the figure. Drape is an important factor which determines how well a particular fabric will move with the body and maintain the shape of the style. The soft handle of a fabric is suitable for a garment with draped or flowing features and a stiff fabric is suitable for a tailored style. The sheen of fabrics such as sateen, make them more suitable for evening wear than any daytime wear because such fabrics reflect more light during the day than night due to their smoothness (Vanderhoff).

The quality or texture of a material can alter the tone of its colour. A rough surface may affect the apparent colour of an object. Very smooth and shiny surfaces attract attention because of the amount of light they reflect. On the other hand, very rough textures have small projections that cast shadows in the light. These shadows make the colour seem darker. An identical colour in two fabrics with different textures may not look the same. E.g., boucle fabric will look darker than a piece of cotton-lawn fabric dyed the same colour. Pile weave fabric gives richness and depth to the shade of colour of the fabric due to its structure and texture.

Texture can create illusions to the figure of the wearer, a shiny fabric such as satin appears to increase size and thus, makes figures look larger than they are. It also emphasizes figure faults or defects therefore; it is not suitable for heavy persons. Glossy texture also makes a slender figure look smaller. On the other hand,

materials with matt surfaces such as crepes and woolen fabrics have the reverse effect. Heavy, bulky textures such as tweed add bulk to the figure and therefore make the short heavy person look fatter and shorter. Stiff materials which are rigid in texture stand away from the figure, adding more width. Thus, they make a slim figure look broader than the actual size (Manmeet, 2008).

### 1.5 Colour in fashion designing

Colour creates the most visual impact when seen from a distance, it is the most influential element that contribute to the overall nature of the garment. (Burke, 2011). There are no fixed rules about flattering colour. Colour has personal values therefore personal preferences for certain colours will affect an individual's choice. It is possible to wear all colours if one knows how to use them wisely. Colour can affect and reflect the way people feel. Warm colours such as bright red, oranges and purples are stimulating and exciting colours which can make people feel happy (Faiola, *et al*, 1982). Soft colours such as blues, greens and white suggest coolness and calmness. Black and greys have a depressing effect.

### 1.6 Principles of design in fashion

According to Vanderhoff, the aim of fashion design is to choose the principles of design as a guide to the application of the elements. This means that the principles help the designer to understand how the elements of design should be used in creating suitable designs in order to achieve the goals of clothing. Tate (1989) stated some of the goals of fashion as: to achieve a clothing that is comfortable to wear; to achieve a pleasant appearance of individual; to emphasize good points and minimize the bad points on the figure known as figure faults. The principles of design are: unity, balance, rhythm, repetition, emphasis, proportion and scale (Vanderhoff, Tate). These are applied when one wants to create an aesthetically attractive design. Aesthetic involve the three-dimensional rules of construction called the elements and principles of design. The principles of design are the rules that govern how these elements are combined (Tate).

### 1.7 Balance

Balance in a design may be either formal or informal. Formal balance is also known as symmetrical balance or equal balance. In organization, designs which look the same on both sides of a garment, have a formal balance or symmetrical balance. Symmetric balance places style lines and details evenly on the garment (Burke).



**Plate 1:** *Principle of balance*



**Plate 2:** *Asymmetric Balance*

In a balanced design, the weight of different elements of the design is equally distributed to create balance. This gives stability to the whole design. When the various parts of the design for example colour, texture, line and motif in the fabric have been arranged so that the feeling of equilibrium results, it is a formal design. This is so when the design is the same on either side of the centre (left) as shown in **Plate 1**. A feeling of balance is also

produced when large areas of tint are equalized by small areas of either bright colour or shades (right) as indicated in **Plate 1** (Manmeet, 2008).

Informal or asymmetrical balance means unequal balance. This means that though each side of the design is equally interesting or important it does not look exactly like the other side of the design it involves placement of objects in a way that will allow objects of varying visual weight to balance one another around a fulcrum point. (Mazumder, 2011) To achieve a more exciting dramatic effect asymmetrical balance can be used. An example is the one shouldered dress and the dress (left) with a slanted hem (right) in **Plate 2**.



**Plate 3:** *Principles of emphasis*



**Plate 4:** *Principle of rhythm*

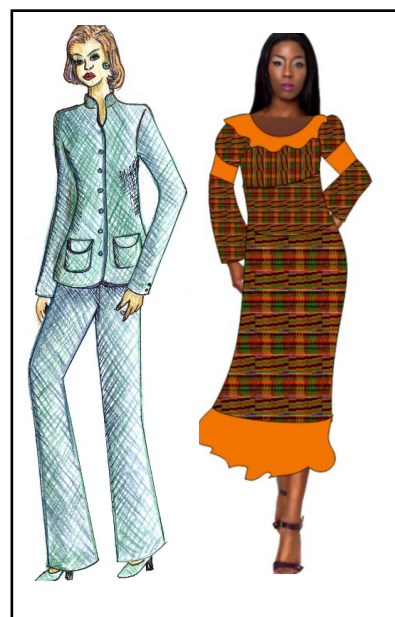
Another principle of design is emphasis. Something that is singled out or made more prominent has emphasis. An element of a design that dominates or becomes the centre of interest has emphasis. A highlight in a design is an emphasis in that design. It is the centre of interest because it predominates over the rest of the design. Emphasis can be created by contrasting texture, colour, lines, dots, or by using an unusual shape sewn onto the garment in the form of appliqué as shown in **Plate 3** (left) or fringes (right) respectively.

### ***1.8 Rhythm***

A design has rhythm when the line, colour and texture have been arranged in an orderly way so that one's eyes moves easily from one part of the design to another. A pleasing rhythm holds a design together the curved edge of a repetition of colour may also be used to create rhythm in either a dress as in **Plate 4** (right). Repetition of colour in the three tier flare at the hem of the garment in **Plate 4** (left) creates rhythm. By the regular repetition of design features such as curves, texture, lines and colour, rhythm is created. In **Plate 4** (right), the repetition of gathered strips of fabric sewn on the slit also creates a rhythm.



**Plate 5:** *Rhythm by gradation and radiation*



**Plate 6:** *Unity of shapes colour*

*Rhythm by radiation* is created in a dress when lines flow from a centre of interest, as shown in **Plate 5** (right) where gathering is made by an inserted ring, at the centre front of the blouse. The gathering attracts one's eyes to the movement of the lines in the design. **Plate 6** is an example of rhythm by radiation. *Rhythm by gradation* (progressive rhythm) is achieved by increasing or decreasing the size of elements such as shape, line and colour as they are repeated. In **Plate 5** (left) the appliqué in the dress decreases in size towards the hem of the garment. It can be very effective in creating interest in a garment.

### 1.9 Unity

A design is said to have unity if all the design elements and principles work together to produce a pleasing effect. For example, unity of line is important to a pleasing appearance, as in **Plate 5** (left), where curved lines are used for the neckline, the pockets tabs and the hem of the jacket. When lines are properly unified the design looks complete. Again, when colour is repeated in a dress it unifies the design as in **Plate 5** (right).

## 2.0 METHODOLOGY

The design used in this research is the mixed type; quantitative and qualitative. The research methodology adopted is descriptive survey through which views were sampled from 60 respondents. The criterion of selection is based on dressmakers' experience of at least 5 years of continuous work. The descriptive survey was used in discovering the current state of affairs as regards dressmaking. This method permitted the researchers to gather information from a reasonable number of people in a relatively quick and inexpensive way. The simple random sampling method was used and the data gathering tools used were questionnaire and interview. The formal and informal interview schedules were employed by way of structured interview surveys. The target population includes dressmakers within the Ho Municipality while the accessible population covered sixty dressmakers. The respondents were interviewed and questionnaires administered to them at random at their workshops.

## 3.0 RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The data collected is based on the application of basic design in sewing by dressmakers. The main focus was the number of years dressmakers have served in the sewing industry in relation to their knowledge in basic design using the elements and principles of design; sources of styles chosen by clients and their effects on dressmaking; and knowledge about human figure types.

**Table 1:** *Number of years in the sewing business*

Year	Frequency	Percentage (%)
5 - 10 years	15	25
11 - 15 years	12	20
16 - 20 years	21	35
Above years	12	20
<b>Total</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Field data

**Table 1** highlights the working experience of respondents. The working experience of the 60 respondents revealed that as many as 55% have been working for over 16 years and only 5% have little knowledge about the use of lines. In relating their working experience to the knowledge of basic design, it is evident that the application of the elements and the principles to sewing was not dependent on the number of years in the business. The reality is that only 2% had some knowledge about principles of designing out of the 25% who have been working between 5 - 10 years.

**Table 2:** *Sources of styles chosen by clients*

Source	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Catalogue	15	25
Calendar	12	20
From what people wear	21	35
By describing it	12	20
<b>Total</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Field data

**Table 2** reflects the sources of styles chosen by clients. It is clear that majority, that is, 33 representing 55% get their styles or ideas from what people wear and by way of description. On the other hand, a total of 27 respondents representing 45% stated that styles chosen by clients are from the catalogue or calendar. It is obvious that the dressmakers do not have too much to say about the choice of styles by their clients. The choice of the customer is paramount, thus, stressing the point that the dressmakers have no idea about suitable styles for each figure type. It is apparent to conclude that respondents cannot impress or force their customers to select a particular style for sewing.

**Table 3:** *Knowledge about human figure types*

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	12	20
No	48	80
<b>Total</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Field data

**Table 3** indicates that 12 respondents who represent 20% have just a slight idea about human figure types. Specifically, they stated that they know about fat, tall and short figures only. On the other hand 48 or 80% signifying the majority had no idea.

**Table 3:** *Choice of fabric for figure types*

Choice of fabric	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Ability to choose fabrics	24	40
Inability to choose fabrics	36	60
<b>Total</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Field data

In the case of the choice of fabric for figure types, respondents asserted categorically that they do not choose the fabric colours but the customers do by opting for colours that appeal to them. On the part of the respondents, 40% of affirmed that they are capable of choosing suitable plain coloured fabrics to match styles which demand a combination with plain coloured fabrics. However, majority representing 60% indicated that they do not know much about relating colour in the patterned fabric with a plain coloured combination. They stated their handicap as their inability to identify related colours and that they have never had any form of education in colour. In confirmation, majority forming 90% of the respondents are (semi illiterates) this means they had formal education up to the basic level.

## CONCLUSION

The study concluded that the knowledge about basic design has a positive impact on the styles the designer produces for each figure types. When this knowledge is applied, styles fit very well and enhance the image of the wearer. Basic design therefore serves as a tool that would help the dressmaker who applies it, to have competitive advantage in skill development over others who have no such knowledge in the fashion industry. Secondly, dressmakers in the Ho Municipality have no formal education on figure types or basic design during their apprenticeship period. It is clear that they have no idea about suitable styles for each figure type. The fact that the dressmakers have been engaged in sewing for a number of years does not mean they have knowledge about basic design, that is, the effective use of the elements and the principles of design.

The study therefore recommends that, a series of workshops and seminars be organized for dressmakers on the use of basic design in choosing suitable styles for their clients. Again, knowledge in basic design will help dress makers to select plain or coloured fabrics to match other patterned or textured fabrics. Also, the dressmakers need to know about the different figure types, in order to help clients to choose suitable styles.

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